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Continuum Home Health, Inc. of New Haven appreciates this opportunity to provide testimony to the Human Services Committee to address the Governor's budget regarding Medication Administration. My name is Kathy DellaMura. I am the Vice President of Continuum Home Health, Inc. and I have over 30 years' experience as a RN working with both the institutional geriatric population as well as medical and behavioral health home care clients.

We applaud the Governor's initiatives to provide cost effective and dignity preserving care to some of our most vulnerable residents. One can easily envision how persons with chronic medical problems who are receiving home health aide services could benefit from having the aide assist with medication administration. Many of these individuals are very knowledgeable about their medications and have an established and trusting relationship with their aides. It can also be a great boon for family caregivers as it provides some relief of the caregiving burden.

We also support the re-balancing initiative, to move people out of nursing homes and long term care facilities and into the community. We have had some wonderful successes with individuals suffering from both medical and psychiatric illnesses, who are now living successfully in the community with only weekly medication pre pours after having lived in institutions for several years.

However, we also have some grave concerns about our more fragile clients, particularly those with serious mental illnesses who lack the awareness and judgment to self direct their care. These are individuals who are unable to acknowledge the need for medication, may selectively refuse some or all of their pills, or attempt to pocket or cheek their pills once they are given. Some of these individuals recognize their pills only by color or shape, which can frequently change for generic medications. These changes can elicit reactions ranging from paranoia and agitation to medication refusal.

Nurses undergo extensive and intensive training in regards to medication. Medication errors continue to be a serious problem throughout the healthcare system. We are concerned that these risks could increase if medications are administered to these patients by home health aides and PCAs with limited experience and training. Medication administration error risks are well known and include:

- Look alike/sound alike drugs (very different medications with similar sounding/looking names)
- Generics – the same medication may have radically different color, shape, size from one prescription renewal to the next.
- "Do not crush/split" medications – can have cause significant health risks if these pills are crushed or split
- Identification of drug interactions/side effects (new/changed meds)
- Time between doses for twice and three times daily meds – some medications require a minimum amount of time or must be given at specific intervals.

We agree with the Governor that reforms to the health care system need to be not only cost effective but to reduce costs wherever possible. A key component of cost effectiveness includes limiting inpatient hospitalizations. The skilled nursing assessment which occurs during a routine nursing medication administration visit provides an early warning system for individuals with serious psychiatric symptoms. The nurses are trained to notice subtle signs of decompensation as well as medical symptoms (e.g., those caused by unstable blood sugar levels and blood pressure, as well as infections causing mental status changes such as UTIs, pneumonia).

This early identification of incipient problems, and coordination of care with physicians, is critical to the prevention of hospitalization, and to reduction in length of hospital stays for those individuals requiring inpatient treatment for stabilization of acute psychotic symptoms. We believe that the potential consequence of reducing nursing visits and replacing them with medication administration visits by non-skilled and paraprofessional workers will place the vulnerable population of actively psychotic persons at increased risk of harm to themselves, and increased costs to the state.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony and share our experiences with you today. If you have any further questions, please contact me at 203-782-3192 or [kdellamura@continuumhomehealth.org](mailto:kdellamura@continuumhomehealth.org).